

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Brennan Schliphack and I am a student at Central Connecticut State University. I am also a citizen of the United States and a resident of Vernon. The reason I am writing today is on behalf of SB273: AN ACT CONCERNING DEBT-FREE COLLEGE, which would enable in-state high school graduates enrolled in regional community-technical colleges to graduate without student loans; and HB7161: AN ACT ESTABLISHING FINISH LINE GRANTS, which would allow undergraduate students at public institutions of higher education to finish earning their degrees without student loans. I am in support of debt-free college education, but I believe changes must be made to the bill to help more students.

I was born and raised in Vernon, Connecticut and have lived here my entire life. Growing up my family always valued education as they did not want me having to work the types of jobs they had to. As a first-generation college student, there was no questioning that I was going to pursue a college degree. During my education journey starting out at Rockville High School, I really did not know what type of degree I wanted to pursue, nor had a clue of which college would be the best fit for me. Many of my friends were talking about the so-called college experience but I knew this path was not for me. My parents could not afford to help me with my tuition so there was no questioning whether or not I could have the privilege to live on campus. I took it upon myself to get a part-time job at Swiss Cleaners and a few other side jobs so that it could help cover the cost of school and decided I would put my first two years in at Manchester Community College. It was here that I started to better understand what types of careers I might be interested in, and began to learn more about myself. Luckily, through my various part-time jobs, financial aid, and scholarships I was able to afford my education. Without any one of these components, I would not have been able to attend college. From there, I decided to go to Central Connecticut State University where I would pursue Technology Education. This college decision was made mostly due to my financial situation; however, I was happy I could pursue a four-year degree regardless of the location.

After transitioning into Central Connecticut State University as a commuter, it was difficult to transition my way into a four-year university. However, through some additional soul searching, I decided that I still wanted to pursue a career with children but teaching right now was not it. I have since decided that I want to pursue a career in school counseling and therefore, I switched majors to sociology which is more relevant to the career path I am interested in. I truly value higher education and recognize without it, I would not be able to pursue my dream. This is why I am in such strong support of this bill to allow students like me to focus more on their education and less on the means of paying for it. I also think it is imperative as a country to have a well-educated population. However, in hearing about this bill, I noticed that filling FAFSA was a requirement of the program. This language, while it may seem minor, prevents Undocumented students from receiving both SB273 (the program of debt-free community college) and HB7161 (program for finish line grants) because undocumented students are barred from filling out the FAFSA without a social security number. I find this language extremely disturbing and also heart-breaking. As someone who knows many undocumented students who are simply trying to pursue their dreams like myself, I find it very discouraging that they would not be able to receive the same

benefits as myself. Undocumented students should not be prevented from receiving this aid. This discriminatory language is not representative of the welcoming state of Connecticut and should be adjusted accordingly. All students, regardless of status, should have the potential of going to college. Education is a right, not a commodity, and should be treated as such. Allowing undocumented students to have access to debt-free community college would allow these students to afford college, which they may not be able to otherwise due to the limited jobs which are available to them, and would allow them to become better-contributing members of society. I also relate this struggle to my experiences as someone born and raised in Connecticut. Had I not been provided with aid, scholarships, and a part-time job college would not have been an option. With less debt, more people are likely to spend more in other areas of their life, further assisting Connecticut's economy. Not only is this decision a moral one but it would be beneficial to my community, family, and the state as a whole, allowing people equal access to a better education which translates to further job opportunities and a brighter future.

Thank you so much for listening to my story and my experiences; I hope the committee will make the necessary changes so that our immigrant students can qualify as well.

Sincerely,

Brennan Schliphack